

## Robert Bennett - Enduring Temptation

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Okay, so as you know, our theme text for this Convention is James 1:12. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to them that love him. This verse is one of the exceeding, great and precious promises to given to the prospective members of the Body of Christ. It holds the promise of the crown of life to those who demonstrate their loyalty to the divine program by enduring temptation.

Our assignment today is to take a closer look at what this verse has to tell us, and so we're going to approach the subject by dividing it into two halves, or more accurately, to two halves plus a phrase in the middle that joins them together. The first half of our theme text defines the task at hand. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation. It describes what is required of us, the thing which we are to do.

The second half of the verse explains the outcome, the reward offered. He shall receive a crown of life which the Lord has promised to them that love him. As we explore these two parts, we will take the opportunity to examine some of the words that are used. Our aim is to get a better understanding of what James is actually saying. However, we're not going to look at the words in the order that they appear in our theme text.

Rather, we're going to take them in an order that we feel promotes our understanding. In fact, we're going to start with this word man in our theme text in order to know who is being addressed.

So when our theme text tells us, blessed is the man that endureth temptation, who is this man? Should we take it literally, or does this promise apply to women also? Well, of course we know that it does. After all, in the first verse of the book of James, it addresses the epistle to the 12 tribes which are scattered abroad. So, generally speaking, we understand this to apply to all the members of the early church.

But it's not so much of a stretch to say also that this salutation would also include the entire Gospel church throughout the entire age. Still, that does not mean that it is without limitation. For instance, reprint 2258 explains that only those who have made a covenant of sacrifice with our Lord have this promise that God will direct any and all of our difficulties in life. Which means that our theme text is not addressed to just anyone who claims the name of Christ, but primarily to the new creation. Although I suspect that anyone who follows the advice of our theme text would get a blessing.

Now let us jump to probably the most important part of our theme text for us to understand it's the word temptation. Blessed is the new creature that endureth temptation, and let us begin with the observation that the King James has not used the best choice of words in this instance. It's far too easy to make assumptions about what the word temptation means. Usually we think of it as an enticement, as some desirable thing that is offered, as a lure to get us to do something.

However, that's not what the thing text is talking about. In the Greek, the word is Strong's 398786 and it means a putting to the proof. So the thought is not that of enticement, but rather of a test. A test that will demonstrate the true condition of our heart. Which, of course, brings up a number of questions.

Why do we have to be tested? What is gained by our testing? What is the source of this testing? And how do we determine whether we have successfully passed or not? Well, we hope to hope to

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explore these questions and a few more during the next hour.

Of course, take another look at reprint 2258. It actually gives us a pretty good place to start. It tells us that the point of our trials is to prove us. They are intended to test our love, to see whether or not our characters are fixed, rooted, and grounded in righteousness, and while this is a fair explanation of why we have trials, it leaves a couple of our questions unanswered.

For instance, it does not specify who is conducting the test or who is judging the outcome, although the answer to this should be fairly obvious to us. We know that our Heavenly Father is the one who directs the trials and difficulties that test us. He is also the judge who evaluates how well we have succeeded in the test. It is to him that that we are demonstrating our loyalty and our character. Now, to be clear, while our Heavenly Father does allow us to be tested, he is not the source of the trouble that creates the test.

If that sounds like double talk, think of it this way. Any trouble that might come our way is an opportunity for a test. However, the trouble is not the test. The test is how we handle the trouble. But now, if God is not the source of our trouble, from where does it originate?

Well, that's another rhetorical question, because we all know the answer to that. It's those three primary sources that cause us trouble. The world, the flesh, and the adversary. Sometimes the adversary presents us with a temptation to do something that we know is wrong. Other times, friends and acquaintances tempt us to live a life of more or less indulgence.

They tempt us to relax our fidelity to the Lord, and then there is the world, which is constantly trying to entice us with wealth or status or the possession of earthly good things. This type of testing comes from without.

It surrounds us. However, the source of temptation that causes us the most trouble is our flesh, our own natural predisposition. Perhaps it's a love of ease or a reluctance to endure hardness. Perhaps it's some other element of self love. Maybe it's one of those secret things that like to hide in the corners of our heart.

You know, it's real easy for us to think that we love our Heavenly Father and His will supremely. That is, until we're tested severely along that line, and then we find out that maybe our love for doing his will needs a little polishing.

This is why our Lord permits trials and temptations and difficulties to test us. He inquires of us as he inquired of Peter in John 21:15, Lovest thou me more than these? Our honest answer to that question will have much to do with our worthiness for that crown of life.

Now, back on our list of temptations and sources for our trials, we notice that our Heavenly Father was not one of them. However, there is a nuance about this that we need to understand. Temptation may come from those other three sources, but not from our Heavenly Father. The reason is that those other sources attempt to lead us into wrongdoing or somehow cause us to be unfaithful. But our Heavenly Father will never do this.

How do we know? Well, we have many scriptures that tell us he is firmly opposed to evil.

For example, Psalms 5:4 tells us, For Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness. Neither shall evil dwell with thee. Or as Young's transliteral renders it, evil inhabiteth thee not, and then we have Habakkuk 1 13, especially in the New English translation, where it says, you are too just to

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tolerate evil. You are unable to condone wrongdoing.

So God is not the source of temptation. Because God will not entice anyone to sin, neither does he incite wickedness or wrongdoing. Even when we look at the history of mankind during the permission of evil, we see that the very few times where God has interfered with mankind at all, he has done so with the purpose of restraining sin and evil. After all, the purpose for the flood was to keep evil in check. So also was the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Our Heavenly Father has never used his power to harden the heart of any man. On the contrary, his providence, his blessing, His Instructions and His mercies are all intended to soften the heart of mankind and the truth, and this truth is the reason behind James 1:13, the verse that follows our theme text. It tells us that let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God. For God cannot be tempted with evil.

Neither tempteth he any man. Looking at this passage, we find a couple of thought provoking concepts. The first is that God tempts no man. That is, he tempts no man with evil. To be sure, our Heavenly Father will test us.

Have no doubt about that. But there is a difference between the testing which our Father considers proper and the testing and temptations which come from the adversary. The former are an assessment of our loyalty to God and to the principles of righteousness. They are intended to be a help and a blessing.

The temptations provided by Satan, on the other hand, are in the nature of pitfalls and snares to entice us into evil and wrongdoing, inducements to make right appear wrong and wrong right that put light for darkness and darkness for light. In this sense of misrepresentation and ensnarement, God will tempt no man. However, he will test our character by allowing the principles of both good and evil to be placed before us. He will also permit sifting and testing among those who claim to be his people to separate the true from the false. Yes, the testing which our Heavenly Father gives us is for our good and not for our failure.

For example, God will tempt us to do good by setting before us his exceeding great and precious promises. These wonderful promises act as a magnet to draw us toward that which is blameless and beneficial. This testing will make manifest the blood good or the evil tendencies of our character, as well as our strength or weakness.

The second point made in James 1:13 is that God cannot be tempted with evil. It's just not possible.

Now, this is a very curious thought. It seems beyond our comprehension. How can it be impossible for God to be tempted with evil? Well, the answer to this has to do with the fact that humanity, even perfect humanity, has its limitations. It has limitations of knowledge as well as limitations of endurance.

However, these limitations do not apply to the divine nature. Our Heavenly Father has the ability to intuitively know good from evil. He knows the end from the beginning and therefore cannot be deceived into doing anything evil. Neither can he be tempted to do evil by any supposed advantage that it might offer. Recall that there are two universal principles, good and evil.

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Long ago our God determined that of those two, only good would remain active throughout all eternity. This short period that we call the permission of evil has been allowed for the benefit of all of God's creation. It's designed to demonstrate the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and while evil as a principle will always exist, there will come a time when it will be no longer active.

Of course, at the present time we are surrounded by evil. It tries us to the very depths of our soul, and I'm sure that we've all had times in our lives when we felt like we were drowning in trial after trial, we wanted to cry out in frustration. Are these really necessary? Why does our Lord allow this to happen to us?

Well, the answer to the question can be found in Acts 14:22. It says, we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God.

Now reprint 4910 tells us that this word tribulation comes from the Greek word tribulum, and a tribulum is an old fashioned tool that is used in the processing of wheat. It separates the kernel, the real wheat, from the husk. In this simple process we have an appropriate illustration. Tribulation is the tool that separates the new creature from the old man.

So yes, tribulation is very necessary in our walk in this narrow way.

And since it is so necessary, reprint 3807 tells us that it would be inappropriate for us to pray to be spared from trials. Rather, in the words of our theme text, we are to endure them. We are to allow the tribulum to do its work of separation. Now, occasionally, First Corinthians 10:13 has been used to suggest that God will release us from a trial. Whenever we ask.

When this verse is cited, the emphasis is usually on the thought that God will make a way of escape the trial, as if when we cried uncle, the trial would miraculously end. But that's not a correct thought. Once again, the King James has failed to capture the real sense of the passage. Looking at this verse, we first notice that the word temptation is used twice and the word tempted once. These are variations of the same word that is used in our theme text.

The promise in 2 Corinthians 10:13 is that God will not allow a test that is beyond that which we are able to bear. Unfortunately, the word escape presents the opportunity for a false conception. Normally we would think of an escape in terms of running away or avoiding. This makes the passage seem to imply a sudden release from our trial. But that's not the best way to understand it.

In the Greek, the word is strong 1545 and it means an exit or an end point. In other words, in each trial that we face, God has specifically designed the trial so that it contains an endpoint that is not beyond that which we can endure. Which means that our Heavenly Father has determined that we are able to endure it, and since we very much trust his judgment, well then our job is simply to endure until the end point has been reached. Besides, when it comes to severe testing, we are not without company.

Hebrews 4:15 reminds us that even our Lord was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, and you guessed it. In this verse the same Greek word is our Lord was tested in all points as we are, and because of that testing our Lord is sympathetic toward our infirmities. He will guide and strengthen us in all our trials.

This brings up an interesting observation that was posed in reprint 3059. The article inquires if it was necessary for the captain of our salvation to be tested and proven. How much more necessary

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is it for we who are children of wrath to also be thoroughly proven? If our Master needed to be tested in the midst of an evil environment, how can we complain if we find ourselves in a similar test and we notice that our Lord Jesus was not tempted because of sin or weakness, for he had neither. Rather, he was tested regarding his obedience to God.

He was tested in respect to his trust in our Heavenly Father's providential watch care. If our Lord had demonstrated any disloyalty, if he had had a will of his own, a will that was not fully submitted to our Heavenly Father's will even to the death of the cross, while he would not have been acceptable as a ransom price for the sin of Adam and for the sins of the Holy world. Likewise, we are tested in order to demonstrate our full submission to the will of our Heavenly Father, to whatever degree he requires of us. Our job is to simply persevere, knowing that this will be pleasing to our Heavenly father.

And so James 1:2 tells us that we should rejoice as we see these trials come upon us. We should count it all joy when ye fall into manifold temptations. Of course, that does not mean that we are to rejoice if we fall into sin when we are tested. No, it means that we are to rejoice when we find testing and trials suddenly come upon us, and this is a point that we sometimes forget.

We forget that temptation is not sin. It only becomes sin when we yield to the temptation. You might remember the old adage that you cannot stop the birds from flying over our heads. However we can stop them from building a nest in our hair, and this is what temptation is like.

Those three sources continually place before our minds impure ideas. They suggest that we do something out of harmony with righteousness, something disloyal, something selfish. But once again, a suggestion is not a sin. The fault begins when we harbor the evil suggestion. If we turn it over in our minds, if we consider its attraction, then we begin to take hold of the evil thing instead of resisting it.

And therein lies the beginning of a secret fault. Left unchecked, it is only a matter of time and opportunity before that secret fault festers into an outward act of sin, and we all know that the end result what is the end result of willful intentional sin? Sin?

Of course, that's not the direction that we desire to go. As long as our hearts remain loyal, we know that our Lord will not let us fall into any trial that he cannot turn into a blessing, and so, in the words of 1 Peter 4:13, Let us rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of Christ's suffering, that when his glory shall be revealed, we may be glad also with exceeding joy. So yes, the new creature can rejoice, knowing that our trials are for our good and not our harm, even when the flesh suffers. The new mind, the new will, can have this joy because the new creature recognizes that any test, however trifling or however important, it's an opportunity to prove our love and devotion to our Heavenly Father and His cause.

For this reason we have the encouragement of 1 Peter 1:6 to greatly rejoice, though now for a season if need be, we are in heaviness through manifold temptations. Yes, our light affliction is but for a moment, and yet it produces a far greater result.

Okay, so now that we've spent a fair amount of time talking about temptation, we need to point out that our theme text is not really about temptation. James 1:12 is about enduring temptation. So what does it mean to endure? And especially what does it mean to endure the testing which our Lord has for us? We find this question presented in reprint 5499, and the answer is that enduring temptation does not mean enduring one or two trials.

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No, our Heavenly Father is looking for a permanent attitude of endurance. Trials are simply an opportunity to show the Lord that we will endure. But wait a minute. Take another look at that paragraph. Notice that the word patient has been added when it says the attitude of patient, endurance, and faithfulness when tempted.

There's a disconnect here when we compare the King James it simply says, blessed is the man that endureth temptation. The word patient is not used, and this is true of most translations. They do not include the idea of patience. Now, to be sure, there are a few that do, such as the Weymouth. Blessed is he who patiently endures trials.

And perhaps this is why our our host Ecclesia has used the Weymouth translation when they gave us the theme text. Still, we would like to know where this idea of patience originates. Is it in the original Greek? Well, yes and no.

The Greek translated endure in James 1:12 is Strong's 5278. It means to stay under or behind, that is to remain so by itself. This definition does not automatically imply patience, although we do find one possible hint of the 18 times that the word is used in the New Testament. The King James has translated it twice patiently, and both times are in 1st Peter 2:20. For what glory is it if when ye are buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?

You shall endure. But if and when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently. This is acceptable with God. The structure of this passage leads us to believe that patience is Somehow implied in Strong's 5278, implied but not specifically stated.

And then we notice that a few verses before our theme text, James 1, 3, 4, has linked patience to our trials. It says that the trying of your faith worketh patience, but let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. In this passage, the Greek word Translated patience is Strong's 5281. It's a noun. We've all studied this word many times.

We know that it means cheerful, patient, endurance. But now we find that the root of Strong's 5281 is Strong's 52, 278 upamano a verb.

And this is the word that is translated endureth endureth in our theme text. So in James 1:12 it's easy to see how the idea of patience can be inferred. Blessed is the new creature that patiently endures temptation.

Now we all know that there are many Watchtower articles that discuss this idea of patient endurance. For instance, reprint 4909 tells us that it signifies a heart and character which demonstrates itself by endurance of wrong or affliction, and it does so with contentment. It demonstrates a heart without rebellion of will, a heart with full acceptance of divine wisdom and love. Reprint 56, 51 refers to James 1, 3, 4 and says if our Faith stands the trial. It will work out in our character, this patient endurance.

In this passage, our attention is drawn to the importance of patience and how it is developed by putting our faith to the test. Or, as we're told in Luke 21, verse 19, in your patience, possess ye your soul.

The same article also tells us that patient endurance is is a condition which God has attached to joint heirship with our Lord. The wisdom of this is manifest when we consider the work to which we are called, the work of blessing all the families of the earth, and that will be a mighty work indeed. It

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is therefore proper that we should be required to demonstrate our loyalty to our Heavenly Father and His principles of righteousness, even to the extent of our willingness to suffer on behalf of those principles.

At some point during your normal routine, take a look around you. You will see that the world is in a fallen condition. It's full of selfishness, disease, and every form of sin imaginable. This alone should give us great sympathy with humanity in their present state, and when we deal with them in the next age, the Church will need to have as much or more patience in order to bring them up the highway of holiness.

Likewise, our brethren in Christ are by nature members of that fallen race. We need to have a great deal of patient endurance with them, even as we desire for them to exercise this grace toward us. So, yes, we are in constant need of this character quality that we call patience. It is a vital element in the character necessary for a place on the throne with our Lord, and we cannot imagine that endurance of a few brief trials would prove the permanence of such a character in us.

No, it will require the demonstration of patient endurance through continuous trials, even unto death.

Oh, and by the way, there is another character element that is vital to this patient endurance that we must develop. To be sure, the character trait of patient endurance is essential. But the virtue of bearing our trials is not just about patient endurance by itself. Rather, it is the way that we endure. It is our cheerful, hopeful endurance.

After all, should we suppose that our Heavenly Father would accept the result of any test if we had endured it with a dissatisfied or unhappy frame of mind? No. As we build character by repeatedly being tested with adversity, our attitude must remain cheerful, hopeful. Our Lord does not wish to hear us grumble or whine, do I have to do this? Rather, he's looking for our zeal and our enthusiasm.

Please, Lord, may I do this? And so our theme text tells us that blessed is the man that endureth temptation.

If we endure our testing with such a hopeful, patient endurance, then we are blessed. Of course, we'd like to know what this means, to be blessed. Well, the word comes from Strong's 3107, and it means fortunate or well off. Fortunate is the new creature who endures temptation. That new creature is far better off having endured patiently than they would have been had they not done so.

That new creature is also better off than they would have been had the trial never happened. In short, if we endure our trials, it will lead to a condition of being blessed.

Reprint 5499 tells us that this word blessed indicates a condition of being in favour with God, and that's a very desirable condition. It is not always a condition of happiness, especially for the flesh. But then again, happiness is a fleeting emotion. It is dependent upon the feeling of an hour here today, gone tomorrow.

On the other hand, to be blessed is a condition of joy and peace, a lasting condition that is not dependent upon circumstance, and this brings us to the second half of our theme text. Recall that the first half told us, blessed is the man that endureth temptation, and we said that this was the requirement, the task at hand. The second half is the promise associated with that task.

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He shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him, and in between those two halves there's the phrase for when he is tried. But we notice that this middle phrase is given in the past tense. When he is tried, that is, after the trial is over, he shall receive the crown of life. This does not mean enduring just one trial or even many trials.

Rather, our entire earthly experience is spoken of as one big trial.

After all, to be called by our Heavenly Father is merely an invitation, even after we have made a full consecration to a covenant of sacrifice. That's not the end of the matter. It only marked our entrance into the school of Christ. When we first said, yes, Lord, I will lay down my little all in thy service. We had no real idea of what that meant.

However, it did not take long to find out that our walk in this narrow way meant opposition, persecution, tribulation and a great deal of self denial. Yes, in this school of Christ we have been learning what it means to walk in the footsteps of our Master, and I'm sure that we all wish that the testing was over, that we had already been declared an overcomer. Yet here we are, five or 10 or even 50 years later, still on this side of the veil, still undergoing trial. So the question we must ask ourselves is, has our enthusiasm faded?

Has this path in which we walk has grown more and more narrow. Have we grown weary and well doing? This is an important question because those who do not love the Lord with all their heart, those who allow self or some other idol to take first priority in their life, well, sooner or later they will be seduced by the world, the flesh, or the adversary. They will be drawn into some form of rebellion against the divine program. Temptation will call them away from self sacrifice to self gratification.

Henry Print 5460 tells us that the Lord wants those who will endure a great fight of affliction, who will endure patiently though the temptations continue long and the tribulations more and more become more and more severe. You know, it's not so hard to run well for a day or a week or perhaps even a year or more. But when the years stretch out and the end cannot be seen, well, here is the real test of a cheerful, patient endurance, and that is what our Heavenly Father is looking for, our permanent likeness to his character, and so the lesson given by our theme text is patient endurance.

That is our test, and the blessing to be gained from that test is the crown of life. But time is required to transform ourselves into the character which our Lord desires, and so our theme text says, when he is trans tried, he shall receive the crown of life when he is tried, after we have successfully passed that test, only then will the crown of life be given, not before. But let us ask, what is this crown of life, and what does it mean to receive it?

Well, the expression the crown of life is just another way of saying the reward of life, and since our theme text is addressed specifically to the new creation, we realize that it means life on the highest plane, the divine nature. But then we run across this paragraph in reprint 3211, and it points out that the Scriptures speak of a number of different crowns, and they all refer to the same thing. For instance, in Revelation 2 verses, the apostle John uses the same language as our theme, be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. But in 1 Peter 5:4, the apostle Peter speaks of the same crown and calls it a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

And then in second Timothy 4, verse 8, the apostle Paul speaks of a crown of righteousness which was laid up for him. So it is a crown of life because it represents life in its fullest measure. It's a crown of glory because it is the reward which brings glory, honor, and immortality, and it is a crown

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of righteousness because it is a reward that is given only to those who are approved of God as righteous. It comes as a result of our obedience to God and the principles of his government, the reward of faithfulness to our covenant.

But let us take another look at 2 Timothy 4:8. In this verse the apostle declares that the crown was already his Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. The crown was already prepared for him, even though he did not possess it at the time, except for by the eye of faith, and this has been true for all the faithful ones in this gospel age. When each is accepted as a probationary member of the Body of Christ, their name is written in the Lamb's Book of life.

They are anointed, and a crown is set apart for them. If they are faithful, their names will never be blotted out, and their crown will never be given to another. If not, well, Revelation 3:11 encourages us to hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown.

We have no desire for another to take our place in the Lamb's book of life, which means that the outcome is up to us. It will depend on our diligence While we walk in this narrow way, the crown is already ours. All we need to do in order to claim it is to complete the first half of our theme text. Now there is one more way that we can think of this crown.

To be clear, our theme text applies specifically to the new creation. They will be crowned with a life on a superior plane, the divine nature. But God has a reward for others also. They will not receive the crown of life offered only to the church class, but there will be a Crown of Life offering offered to mankind in the next age, the crown of perfect human life. It will be given to them as a result of obedience to the testing and the trials of that time.

So maybe we can say that the crown of life is really the blessing of life on whatever plane that might be. Mankind will be crowned with a life which will be perfect, unending, and life on any plane is a blessing from our Heavenly Father, and this brings us to the final part of our theme text which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him. It almost seems redundant for us to say that the promise of the crown of life is to them that love Him. After all, these were they who patiently endured so faithfully for so long.

Shouldn't that be proof enough that they have earned the crown of life? Well, the problem with that thinking is that we do not earn the crown of life. It's given to us as a reward. It's a gift beyond anything that could be earned or expected. So our theme text has given us this last phrase to emphasize.

The key word here is love. The promised crown of life is only given to those with the supreme love of God and His plan. They alone will be successful in gaining that crown.

They alone will have the love necessary to cheerfully endure any and all testing.

As we begin to wrap things up, let us take what lessons we have learned and create a paraphrase of our theme text. It might sound something like Fortunate is the new creature who shall patiently and cheerfully endure testing time after time, day after day, and thus prove their eternal faithfulness and obedience to our Heavenly Father. For when that new creature is tried, when their trial time is over, then that tried and proven one shall receive the crown of life. The Divine nature having thoroughly demonstrated their supreme love for our Heavenly Father, Dear friends, this precious promise before us well let us treat every trial that comes our way, every persecution or difficulty as permitted of God, because by those trials our Lord is proving our love and devotion to Him. By

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them we demonstrate whether or not our characters are fixed, rooted, and grounded in his principles of righteousness.

Therefore, for every painful experience or temptation is an opportunity. Whatever they may be, whether great or small, we should diligently use them to demonstrate the fullness of our love for him and his cause, knowing that they are the means by which we are changed into the likeness of our Master. They are the agencies of his providence to chisel and shape and polish us as living stones for his glorious temple. The new creature to whom God has given the exceeding great and precious promises, cannot be injured by any persecution of the flesh, or by anything that man can do unto us. As long as we are faithful to the Lord, as long as we accept every experience that he permits as a ministration of his providence for our ultimate good and his glory, then truly these things are light afflictions, which are but for a moment and they are working out in us a far more and exceeding, exceeding and great eternal weight of glory.

Soon, if faithful, we shall gather as a glorious company to go out no more forever. In Revelation 3, verse 4, Jesus has promised those who are given this crown of life. He has said, they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. May the Lord add His blessing.